
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 5564

AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL SAFETY.

SUMMARY:

This bill:

1. creates a new safe-travel-to-school grant program to improve student safety along routes to school,
2. requires the State Department of Education (SDE) to approve or reject school district safe school climate plans,
3. adds specific requirements to safe school climate surveys, and
4. requires a feasibility study for a student safety hotline.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§1 — SAFE-TRAVEL-TO-SCHOOL GRANT PROGRAM

The bill creates a safe-travel-to-school grant program to provide grants to towns to improve student safety along routes to school. The Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) administers the program, accepting applications from towns until July 15, 2014, and awarding grants to up to 10 towns by August 1.

DESPP must establish the program for FY 15 to provide grants to towns for expenses incurred as part of improving student safety along routes of travel to schools and in the immediate areas around schools.

Under the bill, a town can submit an application, in a manner DESPP prescribes, that includes a plan to improve student safety along routes of travel to school and in the immediate areas around schools during the hours before and after regular school hours. Each plan must:

1. be developed by the town in consultation with the local police and the local or regional board of education for the town,
2. include the travel routes to schools and areas around the schools the plan will cover,
3. establish the hours before and after school during which supervision may be provided along the travel routes and areas around the schools, and
4. require any person helping to implement of the plan to submit to state and national criminal history records checks prior to plan implementation.

In awarding grants, DESPP must give priority to towns with priority school districts or priority schools (see BACKGROUND).

§2 — STUDENT SAFETY HOTLINE FEASIBILITY STUDY

The bill requires DESPP to study the feasibility of establishing a student safety hotline and submit the study's results by January 1, 2015 to the Education Committee.

The study must include an analysis of:

1. the feasibility of establishing a student safety hotline to receive anonymous phone calls and text messages about the school safety concerns of K-12 students and provide assistance and referrals to the students,
2. the relevant referral areas and appropriate entities and agencies to receive the referrals,
3. student safety hotline operator training,
4. existing student safety hotlines in other states,
5. legal issues that might be associated with administering a student safety hotline, and
6. any other relevant topics or issues associated with such a hotline.

§§ 3 & 4 — SAFE SCHOOL CLIMATE PLAN SUBMISSION AND APPROVAL OR REJECTION

By law, each board of education must submit a safe school climate plan to SDE. The plan must address bullying in the school district and permit parents and students to file complaints and require complaint investigations, the development of a prevention and intervention strategy, and numerous other steps related to bullying and bullying prevention.

Current law requires the local or regional boards of education to approve the plan and submit it to SDE by January 1, 2012. The bill instead requires boards to submit it to SDE for approval by July 1, 2014.

The bill requires SDE to review each safe school climate plan that boards submit and either approve or reject it. SDE may reject a plan if it does not adequately ensure a safe school climate at the district's schools. If SDE rejects the plan, the local board must redevelop and resubmit it to SDE for approval within 30 days after the rejection. If SDE rejects the resubmitted plan, the board must adopt the SDE-developed model safe school climate plan.

The bill requires the board to make the plan available on the school district's and individual school's website 30 days after SDE approves it, rather than 30 days after the board approves it.

§ 5 — SCHOOL CLIMATE ASSESSMENT SURVEYS

Under current law, boards of education must use surveys to collect information on bullying prevention and intervention in school as part of their assessment of school climate. The bill specifies that districts must use a uniform survey to (1) collect information about students' perspectives and opinions on the climate of their school and (2) allow students to complete and submit the surveys anonymously.

BACKGROUND

Legislative History

The House referred the original bill (File 451) to the Finance,

Revenue and Bonding Committee, which favorably reported a substitute that removes a provision extending a school security grant program to private schools.

Related Bills

sSB 106 (File 315), favorably reported by the Human Services Committee, also changes local board of education responsibilities regarding safe school climate plans. Among other changes, the bill requires boards to reassess their plans annually and resubmit them to SDE every two years.

sHB 5593 (File 636), favorably reported by the Judiciary Committee, also makes changes to safe school climate plans by requiring that they address teen dating violence in addition to bullying.

Priority School Districts

By law, priority school districts are districts whose students receive low standardized test scores and have high levels of poverty (CGS § 10-266p(a)). There are 15 priority districts. A priority school is one with a high concentration of low-income students that is not located in a priority district (CGS 10-265e).

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 32 Nay 0 (03/21/2014)

Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 50 Nay 0 (04/22/2014)